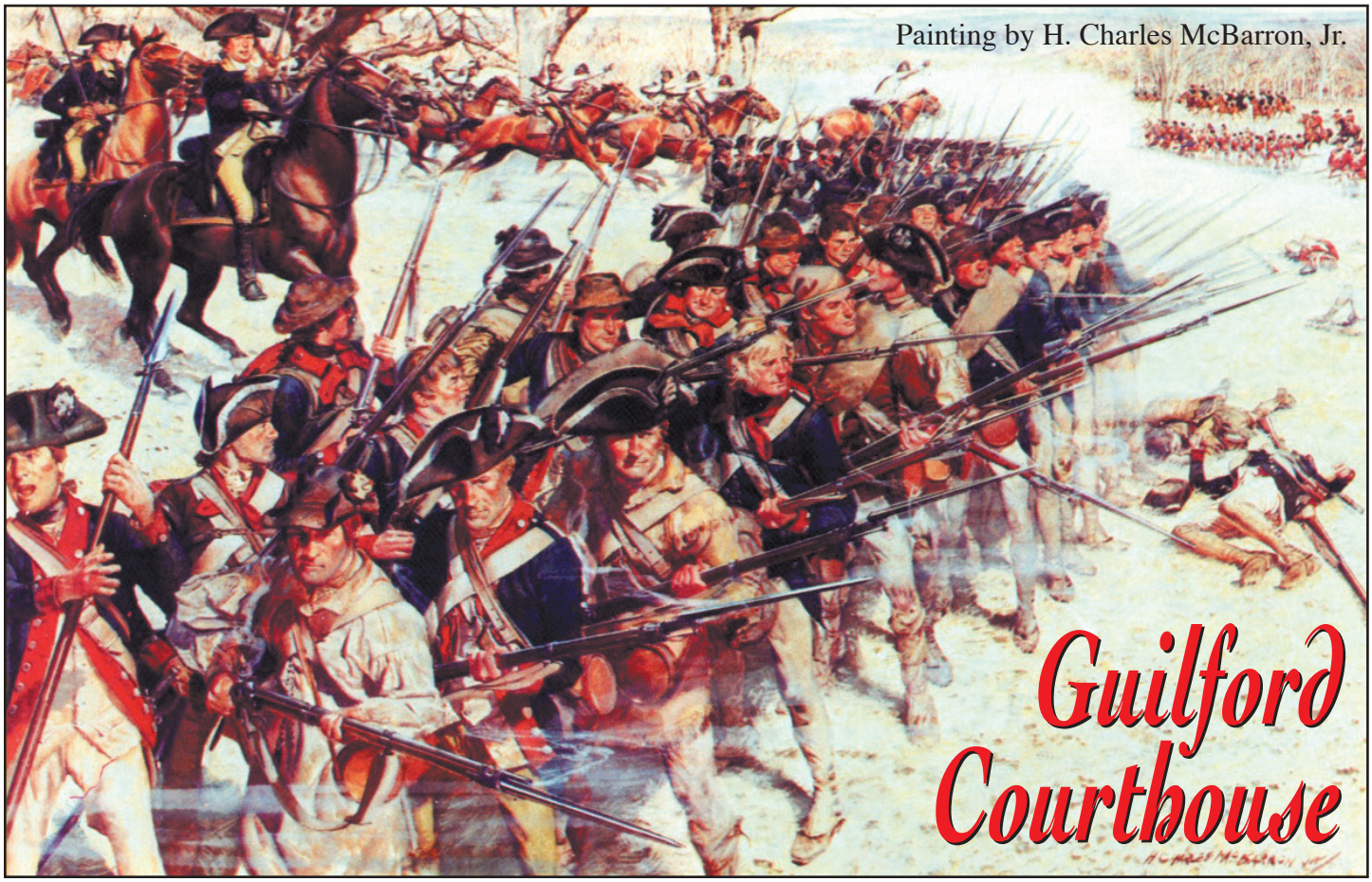
MOUNTAIN ECHO ONLINE

McQuiston, McQuistion, McQuesten, McQuestion, McCuiston, McCuistion, and other related names

Publication of Clan Uisdean USA, Inc. • Jim McQuiston, historian • jamesamcquiston@gmail.com • May 2008



Mel Gibson produced and starred in two movies directly related to our family history. In Gibson's epic, *Braveheart*, Robert the Bruce is featured as first an enemy of, and later a friend to William Wallace.

The final battle of that movie is Bannockburn, where our two great ancestors, Robert the Bruce and Angus Og McDonald, fought side-by-side to defeat the English army.

Angus Og was the great, great-grandfather of *Uisdean,* also known as Hugh of Sleat. Robert the Bruce was *Uisdean's* 4x great-grandfather.

The final battle at the end of Gibson's 2000 historical epic, *The Patriot,* drew its inspiration from two specific battles of the American Revolution: Cowpens and Guilford Courthouse.

Clan Uisdean members most certainly fought at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, and possibly at Cowpens.

The Americans used the same basic tactics at both battles. In Gibson's movie, the name of the battle, as well as the winning side, are taken from the Cowpens battle.

However, the size of the armies, as well as the presence of Generals Greene and Cornwallis, came from the Guilford Courthouse battle.

The scene where Cornwallis orders his artillery to "concentrate on the center," killing both continentals and his own troops, actually took place at Guilford Courthouse.

The Battle of Guilford Courthouse was a battle fought on March 15, 1781, as part of the American Revolutionary War, and at a location inside the present-day city limits of Greensboro, North Carolina.

We know further that the battle was fought very near the homes of several McCuistion and McCuiston family members. One period map shows ten plots of land surrounding the battlefield with one of these two spellings of our name on them.

What is missing from the map is the homestead of Reedy Fork Tom McCuiston who had a road and a bridge named for him. General Nathanael Greene led his forces down McCuiston Road and crossed at McCuiston Bridge to escape from the British.

Greene's official baggagemaster, at this famous battle, was Buffalo Tom McCuistion, son of Thomas and Ann (Moody) McCuistion.

Greene retreated to Speedwell Iron Works to regroup. Henry Lanier lived near the Iron Works and helped feed Greene's troops.

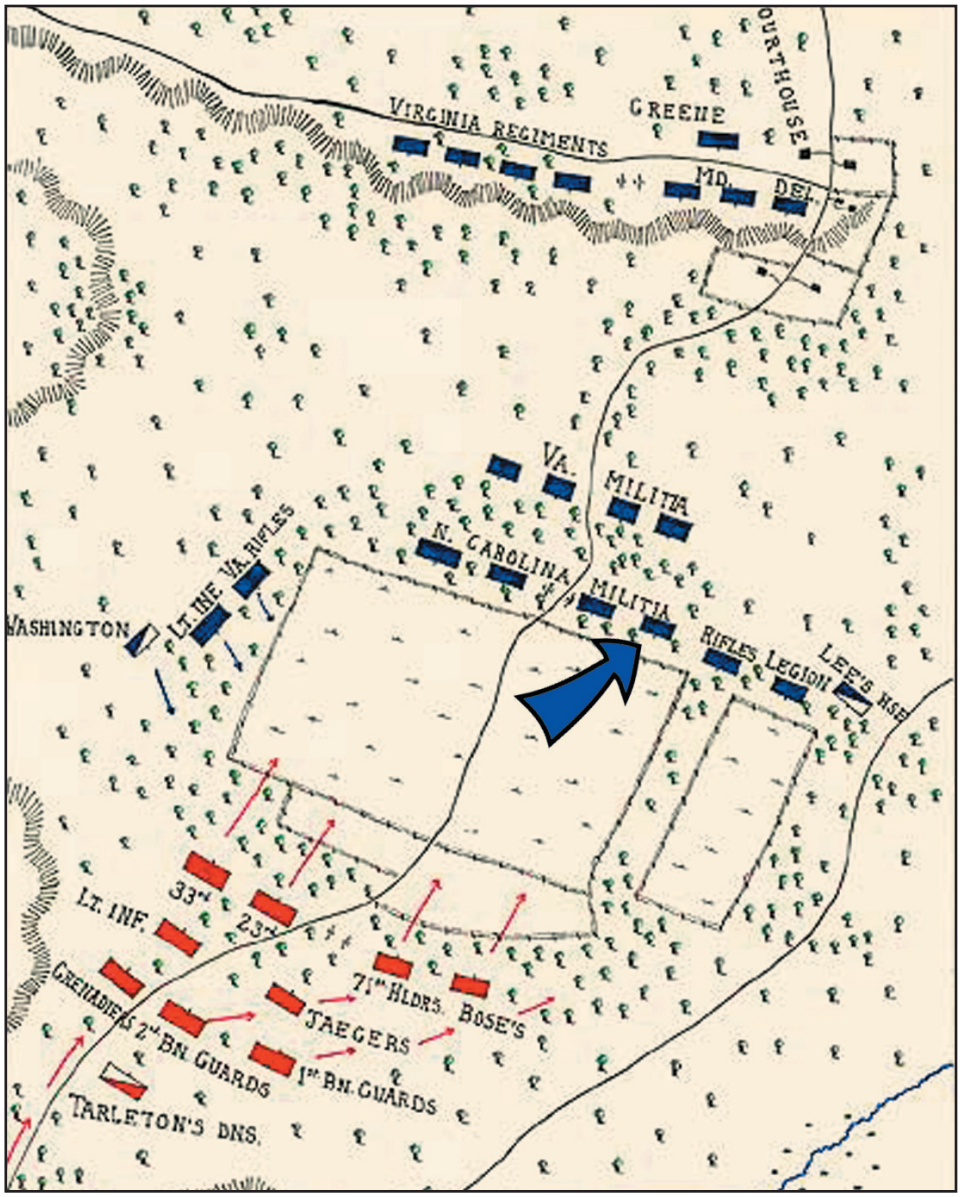
Thomas McCuistion, senior, and his neighbor, David Caldwell, also traveled, during the night of the battle, to Henry Lanier's home.

Elizabeth McCuistion, a daughter of Thomas and Ann, was married to Henry Lanier's son, James, and this couple's daughter, Pamela, is the last person known to have been buried in our family burial ground, in Greensboro, known as the "Old Gibson Cemetery".

At Guilford Courthouse, about 2000 British troops, under General Lord Cornwallis, fought an American force, under Rhode Island native General Nathanael Greene, numbering about 4,400.

Lord Cornwallis' troops were battle-hardened war veterans and included a newly formed group of Highlanders, and a group of Hessian mercenaries.

Greene's troops included some from the Continental Army, and many militia, including a group gathered from the surrounding area,



Acording to information I uncovered for this Mountain Echo, the milita group that I've identified with the large blue arrow, is the local Guilford militia under the command of 35-year-old Colonel Arthur Forbis, an elder at David Caldwell's church. Also, in the ranks of this militia, was Robert Rankin and undoubtably a few McCuiston/McCuistion family members. Ann Moody McCuistion went to the Rankin home, with Caldwell's wife, to pray for success at the battle. Later, it is said, she made it to the courthouse steps, where she loaded rifles and took a few shots at the British, herself.

numbering from 100 to 200 men, including men from our family and from associated families.

Despite the relatively small numbers of troops involved, the battle is considered one of the most decisive of the Revolutionary War. Prior to the battle, the British appeared to have successfully conquered both Georgia and South Carolina with the aid of strong Loyalist factions, and thought that North Carolina might be within their grasp. In the wake of the battle, Greene moved into South Carolina, while Cornwallis chose to invade Virginia. These decisions allowed Greene to unravel British control of the South, while leading Cornwallis to Yorktown and surrender.

At the Guilford Courthouse Battle, the North Carolina Militia were placed in the center. General Thomas Eaton's brigade, from Halifax and Warren counties, was placed at a right angle to the old Salisbury or New Garden road, behind a rail fence which separated the woods from the fields. Eaton's left rested on the road. General John Butler's brigade, from Orange, Guilford and Granville, continued the line on the south side of the road, Butler's right resting on the road, and his whole line being behind a zig-zag rail fence.

On the left of Butler's line was the separate command of Colonel Arthur Forbis, of Alamance, in Guilford County, which consisted of at least one hundred Scotch-Irish Presbyterians; Forbis himself being an elder in the pastorate of Doctor David Caldwell.

In the days leading up to the battle Cornwallis moved very close to the eventual battlefield when he took over the home of Thomas and Ann (nee: Moody) McCuistion as his headquarters. He stationed his troops at Caldwell's home and Log College.

Thomas McCuistion and David Caldwell went into hiding, since both had a price on their heads. Caldwell was a well-known fiery preacher, and Thomas' son, Thomas, was Greene's baggagemaster.

It is our family tradtion, through information collected by both Carleen Daggett and Ed McCuistion, that Andrew Jackson was in Guilford County around the time of the battle, and Ann Moody McCuistion apparently made the claim that he came to her house on the morning of March 12, 1781, to warn her of Cornwallis' approach. He helped her hide a substantial family fortune in a creek near her house.

Greene, at this point was in or near Virginia collecting his troops. He had already chosen the Guilford Courthouse area for the battle, unbeknownst to Cornwallis. Had Cornwallis stayed put, he may have had a more successful day, on March 15th, the day of the battle.

Instead, Cornwallis left the McCuistion home mid-day on the 13th for new headquarters a fair distance away, at Deep River.

The following day he learned that Greene was amassing his troops at the courthouse, near his prevous headquarters. This must have proven irksome to the British commander.

On March 14, 1781, while still encamped in the forks of the Deep River, Cornwallis was informed that a General Richard Butler was marching to attack his army.

With Butler was a body of North Carolina militia, plus reinforcements from Virginia, consisting of Virginia militia, a Virginia State regiment, a Corps of Virginian eighteen-month men and recruits for the Maryland Line. They had joined the command of General Greene, creating a force sometimes estimated at some nine to ten thousand men, but generally considered to be about 4,400.

During the night of March 14th, further reports confirmed the American force was at Guilford Courthouse, some 12 miles away, many having crossed into the battlefield at McCuiston Bridge or Ford. One of those crossing this bridge, twice, was Reverend Sam Houston, from Virginia, a great-uncle to Texas Sam Houston.

Cornwallis decided to give battle, though he had only 1,900-2,000 men at his disposal. He detached his baggage train, 100 infantry and 20 Cavalry under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Hamilton to Bell's Mills further down the Deep River, then set off with his main force, before breakfast was able to be eaten, arriving at Guilford at mid-day. Meanwhile, Greene, having received the reinforcements, decided to challenge Cornwallis. On March 15th, the two armies met at Guilford Courthouse, North Carolina (now within the present Greensboro, North Carolina).

The advance guards from each army met near the Quaker New Garden Meeting House. Banastre Tarleton's Light Dragoons were briefly engaged by Light Horse Harry Lee's Dragoons about 4 miles from the Guilford Courthouse. The British 23rd Regiment of Foot sent reinforcements forward and Lee withdrew, ordering a retreat to Greene's main body.

Light Horse Harry Lee was the father of General Robert E. Lee. Tarleton was Cornwallis' blood-thirsty warrior who had driven the Jackson's, and many others, out of the Waxhaws and on to Guilford County, in late 1780. Jackson reported that at one point, while in hiding in the Waxhaws, Tarleton was so close to him Andy could have killed him easily, if he'd only had a gun at the time.

On approaching the Guilford battefield, Cornwallis found the Americans in position on rising ground about one and a half miles from the courthouse. He was unable to gain much information from his prisoners or the local residents as to the American disposition.

To his front he saw a plantation with a large field straddling both sides of the road, with two more further over on the left separated by 200 yards or so of woodland.

To his right beyond the fields the woodland extended for several miles. On the far side of the first field was a fenced wood, one mile in depth,

through which the road passed into an extensively cleared area around the courthouse. Along the edge of this woodland was a fence forming the American first line of defense and a 6-pound cannon on each side of the road.

Greene had prepared his defense in three lines. North Carolina militia formed the first line, with backwoods riflemen on the left and right flanks to snipe advancing British. In the second line, he placed the Virginia militia. His regulars comprised the last line.

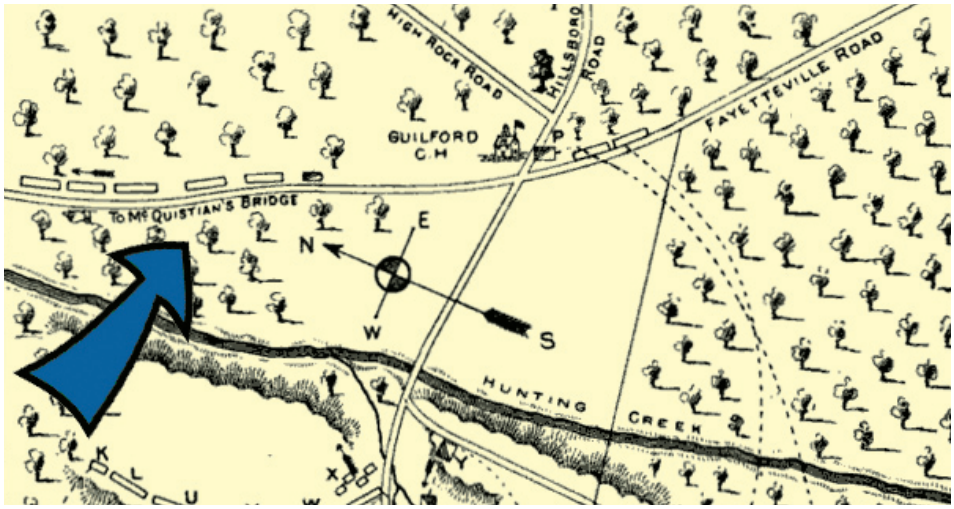
Cornwallis opted to attack up the west side and, following a short barrage of cannon shot on the cannon positions of the first line, at 1:30 p.m., Cornwallis moved his men forward.

When they were about 150 yards short of the fence, a volley was fired from the Americans, whose long guns had a greater range than British muskets, but the British continued until they were within musket shot then fired their own volley in return.

On a command from their leader they then charged forward, coming to a halt 50 paces from the American lines because the North Carolina Militia, as noted by Sergeant Lamb of the 23rd Regiment "had their arms presented and resting on the picket fence...they were taking aim with nice precision."

Urged onward, by Lieutenant Colonel James Webster of the 33rd Regiment of Foot, the British continued to advance. The North Carolina Militia fired their deadly muskets once again.

It is often said that the militia then turned and fled back through the woods, discarding their personal equipment as they ran. The British infantry immediately attacked them and captured two 6-pounders. They then pursued the North Carolina militia into the woods.



This map, prepared by one of Cornwallis map-makers, clearly shows the road to "McQuistian's Bridge". In his war records, Cornwallis refers to our family as McGuestion, with (McCuise) in paranthesis. It is interesting that McQuistian was a common early spelling of our name in New England, particularly in the Boston and Medford, Massachussetts area. The correct name of the road and bridge, based on the branch of the family who owned it, would by McCuiston Road and McCuiston Bridge.

However, there are several accounts that conflict with this version of events. Greene, or one of his commanding officers is reported to have told the militia, "Give me two fires, at killing distance, and I will make the victory sure."

Another version says the command was, "Three rounds, three rounds, my boys, and then you may fall back!"

Robert Rankin, a member of the Buffalo Church, often pointed out different localities of the battlefield, especially on the left, where Rankin fought amongst the North Carolina riflemen.

With this familiar knowledge of events, North Carolina historian, Dr. Caruthers assumes, in his *Life of Caldwell*, as an established fact, known by everybody, that the militia were ordered to fire twice and then retreat. Speaking of Captain Forbis' command he says: "They stood firm until they had fired twice, according to orders."

He says, "They were placed in the front rank, stood firm and fired the number of times prescribed in the general order. Forbis himself fired the first gun in that division, and killed his man."

There are several incidental allusions to this "order" to fire twice, and always as one of the unquestionable facts connected with the battle.

Reverend Sam Houston reported, "The Virginia line was in the forest, the Carolina militia partly in the forest and partly in the skirt of the forest and partly behind the fence enclosing the open space, across which the British force was advancing with extended front. According to orders, the Carolina line, when the enemy were very near, gave their fire, which on the left of the British line was deadly, and having repeated it, retreated. Some remained to give a third fire and some made such haste in retreat as to bring reproach upon themselves as deficient in bravery, while their neighbors behaved like heroes."

As with many historical events you really have to dig to find out the truth. It was stated by Peter Rife, of Virginia, one of Lee's Legion, to Caruthers, that he witnessed the fact with his own eyes, that the men of Guilford fired until the Hessians mounted the fence, and then clubbed their rifles and fought them back, hand to hand. When asked if this was not done by Campbell's men, he replied, "No, it was the North Carolinians. I sat on my horse and saw them with my own eyes."

As the Hessian regiment passed the line of the militia, it wheeled to the right, and, in line with Norton, faced Campbell. Campbell was reinforced by many of Butler's brigade, who retreated in that direction, and also by ***ALL*** of Forbis' men, who formed on Campbell's right. Lee's Legion was on that flank.

The 71st Regiment Highlanders continued on their course up the road and soon engaged Stevens' brigade of Virginians.

It had been the intention of Campbell to fall back and put his corps on the left of Stevens, but the Hessians passed so rapidly in his front as to cut him off. He was also delayed by his conflict with Norton on the left. The riflemen, retiring deeper into the forest, took to the trees and made it so hot for the Guards that they were compelled to retreat in great disorder. Cornwallis came in person to their rescue, and by riding in their front and exposing himself to danger, succeeded in rallying them.

The Hessians being then joined again by the Guards, made a combined charge and drove Campbell to the south, and entirely separated his command from the American army, so that in fact two distinct battles were raging at the same time.

Caruthers then remarked to Rife, "According to history, the North Carolina militia did nothing on that occasion," and he replied with some sternness, "Whoever says the North Carolina militia did nothing on that day, says what is false, for I know better."

Quoting further from Caruthers "William Montgomery, of Guilford County, who was one of Captain Forbis' company and one of the four who stood by him to the last, when describing the scene, usually illustrated it by saying that, after they delivered their first fire, which was a deliberate one, with their rifles, the part of the British line at which they aimed looked like the scattering stalks in a wheat field, when the harvest man has passed over it with his cradle."

The battle had lasted only ninety minutes, and although the British technically defeated the American force, they lost over a quarter of their own men. The British casualties consisted of 5 officers and 88 other ranks killed and 24 officers and 389 other ranks wounded, with a further 26 men missing in action.

The British, by taking ground, though engaged with superior numbers, were tactically victors. Seeing this as a classic Pyrrhic victory, British Whig Party leader and war critic Charles James Fox echoed Plutarch's famous words by saying, "Another such victory would ruin the British Army!"

After the battle, the British were spread across a large expanse of woodland without food and shelter, and during the night torrential rains started. Fifty of the wounded died before sunrise. Had the British followed the retreating Americans they may have come across their baggage and supply wagons, which had been camped up to the west of the Salisbury road in some old fields prior to the battle under the protection of Buffalo Tom McCuistion.

Greene, cautiously avoiding a disaster, retreated with his forces intact. With his small army, now less than 1500 strong, Cornwallis declined to follow Greene into the back country, and retired to Hillsborough.

Tarleton later said, "The position and strength of General Greene at the Iron Works, on Troublesome Creek, did not invite the approach of the British army; Earl Cormwallis, therefore, commenced his march on the 16th for Deep River, on his way to Cross Creek."

The fear of both Tarleton and Cornwallis, to follow Greene, may have been based more on the trouncing they had just received, and less on reconnassiance. They may have given Greene more credit than he was due, that day.

On July 16, 1781, Speedwell Iron Works, on Troublesome Creek, was the camp of General Greene, to which he retired, reaching there on the early morning of Friday, the 16th. He remained there until the morning of Tuesday, the 2Oth of March.

The disorder and derangement accompanying such a fierce battle had to be repaired. The Americans carried their powder and lead and bullet moulds along with the army and manufactured their cartridges in the camp. Greene had lost his two ammunition wagons and the remnant of cartridges contained in them, and one of the first duties of his soldiers was to mould musket and rifle balls for the next battle.

The second duty for Greene was to reorganize his Virginia and North Carolina militia, many of whom had scatterred, while many were wounded and many were now dead.

Captain Dugald Stuart, who commanded a company in the 71st Regiment (called the "Scotch Highlanders") on the day of the battle, when writing to a relative of "the Irish line of the American army, composed of their marksmen, lying on the ground behind a rail fence", said that one-half the Highlanders dropped on the spot.

Another English writer named Lamb establishes the fact that the militia had fired once and reloaded, and when the enemy were within forty paces the militia were resting their rifles on the rails and aiming with the "nicest precision" at their foe. So appalling was their martial array that even the British veterans, who had faced so many dangers from Quebec to Camden, paused and stood aghast at the spectacle, and that only the "magic voice of their commander, accompanied with his reckless exposure in their front, could prevail upon them to advance."

The "havoc" was great, says Lamb, and we may well believe it. Riflemen who could take a squirrel's head from the highest tree would not be likely to miss a scarlet uniform at forty paces.

In his main object—the recovery of the southern states—Greene succeeded by the close of the year, but not without hard fighting and repeated reverses. "We fight, get beat, rise, and fight again," were his words. But rising to fight again was a difficult task after such a brutal battle.

Many of the Guilford militia had looked forward to the battle as not much more than a "shootin' contest".

Having faced down Highlanders, Hessians and Cornwallis himself; having seen their comrades fall and the great Colonial leader retreat from the battlefield; and knowing they'd perhaps be facing their revengeful Tories neighbors before long - all of this must have worn thin their nerves and stamina.

Forbis, the leader of the militia originating from David Caldwell's congregaton and his neighborhood, certainly led our family members at the battle. He is an example of an extraordinary death, after the battle had ended.

The death of Colonel Arthur Forbis was tragical and cruel. After he had fallen with two bullets, one in the neck, the other in his leg, and after he had endured all the horrors of that dreadful , night of cold and rain, a Tory by the name of Shoemaker, a weaver from the neighborhood of Alamance, who was plundering, came near to Forbis, the following day, who begged him for water.

Shoemaker, recognizing Forbis, cursed him and thrust at him with a bayonet, which passed entirely through his leg. Another Tory, more humane, brought water in his hat and administered to the famishing soldier.

The same day, Miss Montgomery, who was searching for her brother, discovered Colonel Forbis, and helping him on her horse. She held the bridle, and led the horse towards home. At a point near where Holt's Chapel now is, two miles east of Greensboro, they were met by the wife of Colonel Forbis, who was starting to look for him. She did not recognize the pallid face and sunken eyes of him who was so dear to her, when in a feeble voice he said, "Betty, don't you know me?"

Colonel Forbis was carried to his home, and Doctor Caldwell, both a Doctor of medicine and of divinity, with his son, attended him. They insisted on amputating the leg, but the Colonel replied, "I want all my body to be buried together," and refused. He lived three weeks. His remains are buried in the cemetery at Alamance Church, five miles south of Greensboro.

The citizens of Guilford County erected a marble monument over his grave. He was not more than thirty-five years old when killed. Mr. Shoemaker was soon found at his home, one night, by the Whigs and hanged to a tree near an old church. The door of the old church was used as a litter to convey his body to his family.

Thomas McCuistion, senior, very likely returned to his home on the 16th, as did Caldwell. It is not known how much longer Buffalo Tom served as baggagemaster for Greene, however his Revolutionary War service is well recognized.

No doubt other family members as well as related families like the Hollands, Nelsons, Flacks, Rankins and more stood in that line - fired once, waited for the British advance - fired again - fought hand-to-hand with German mercenary Hessians - fired on the fellow Scots, the 71st Regiment - and rejoined with another group to continue the fight.

Their squirrel guns took their toll and one-quarter of Cornwallis' "best" were wounded or dead. The Continental leader, Greene, was safe to ride again, and they were left to pick up the pieces of their lives.

The significance of the Battle of Guilford Courthouse can never be over-stated. The role our family played was not just important that day, but extremely significant in the final surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown a few months later. The sacrifice we made, once again in the name of freedom, simply continued a legacy that has been part of our family for hundreds of years.